Prevention Webinar Series

Bullying in Utah
December 18, 2025

Utah State Board of Education

Agenda

- Bullying foundation
- Impact and identification
- Roles in intervention
- Proactive systems and support
- Legal and administrative requirements
- Reporting, investigation and action plans
- Resources

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Partnering to Prevent Bullying in Utah

Goal: To provide comprehensive information and resources for educators on addressing and preventing bullying, cyberbullying, hazing, retaliation, and abusive conduct in Utah schools.

Our commitment:

- The Utah State Board of Education (USBE) is committed to fostering a safe and supportive educational environment for all students.
- A safe learning environment, where all members are treated with dignity and respect, is essential for students to learn and achieve high academic standards.

Foundation and Definition

Prevalence in Utah

- Approximately **one in five** high school students **(19%)** in Utah reported being bullied during the 2021-2022 school year.

- Bullying most often occurs in unsupervised areas and during unstructured times, as well as online.

- Bullying is considered peer abuse and repeated exposure can lead to negative long-lasting effects on health and well-being.

19%

1 in 5

UTAH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
REPORTED BEING BULLIED
(2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR)

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Bullying Defined

Bullying is commonly understood as aggressive behavior that meets the following criteria:

- **P** – Imbalance of **P**ower and Strength
- **R** – **R**epeated over time
- **I** – **I**ntended to cause distress or harm

The Utah State Legislature updated Utah's definition of bullying to reflect this in [Utah Code Section 53G-9-601](#).

- Utah Code divides bullying into both student and staff bullying.
- A single egregious event may also be considered bullying.

Conflict vs. Bullying

- Conflict
  - Respectful disagreement
  - Opportunity for self-monitoring
  - Natural part of human relationships

- What does it look like?
  - Differing opinions
  - Random argument with a friend
  - A single rude comment or tease

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Why Does the Definition of Bullying Matter?

By accurately identifying the nature of the incident, you can choose the right tools to achieve the best outcome.

- Different adult responses:
  - Mediation vs. separating students
- Legislative requirements:
  - Investigation and action plan
- Long term impact:
  - Problem solving opportunity vs. peer abuse

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Types of Bullying

Different types of bullying can include:

- Verbal
- Social
- Physical
- Cyberbullying

**Note**: sexual harassment often occurs in tandem

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Impact and Identification

Impact of Bullying

Students Who Are Bullied May:	Students Who Bully Others May:
Experience depression and anxiety.	Use alcohol and other drugs.
Express numerous health complaints.	Get into fights, vandalize property, and drop out of school.
Demonstrate decreased academic achievement and school participation.	Be abusive toward romantic partners or children as adults.
Bystanders	
Bystanders are more likely to have increased use of tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs and experience increased mental health problems, including depression and anxiety.	

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Impact on School Climate

- Adults (both staff-to-student and staff-to-staff) sometimes model this behavior.

- It erodes the sense of safety and belonging.

- It harms relationships and trust with adults.

- It can negatively affect attendance and academic performance.

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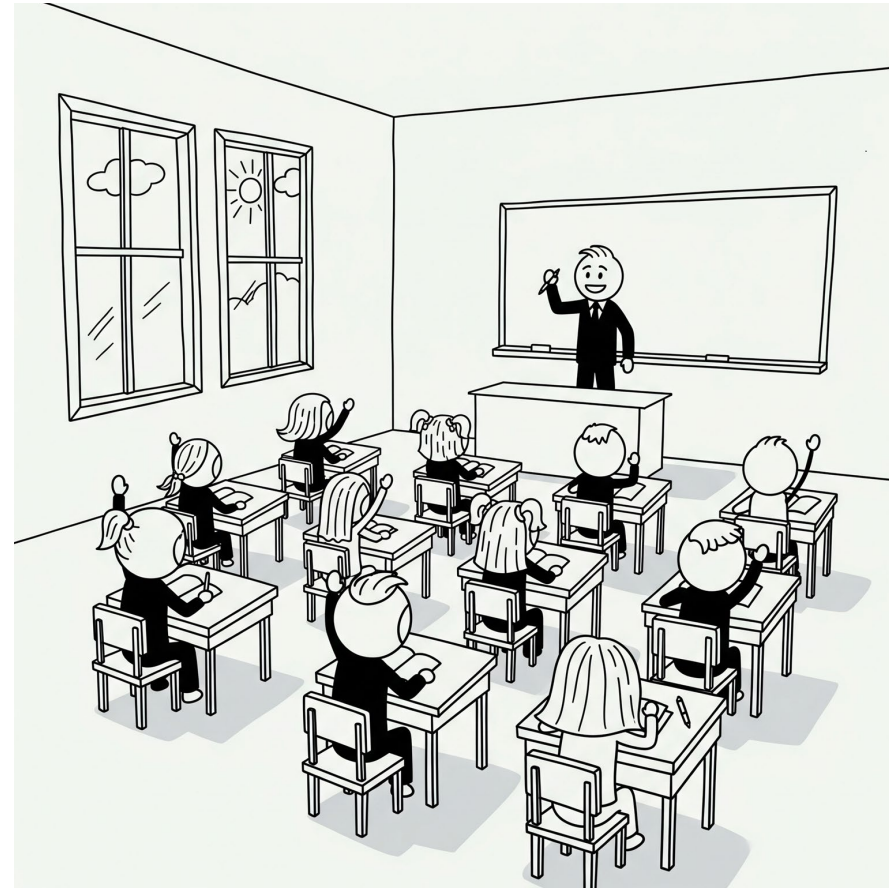
Related Misconduct and Prohibitions

- **Hazing**: subjecting someone to the risk of harm, often associated with group initiations.
- **Retaliation**: taking adverse action against someone because they reported an incident or to influence the investigation.
- **Abusive Conduct**: hostile/offensive conduct from a parent/student toward a school employee.

Additional Prohibitions:

- Making a false report
- Creation/distribution of sexually explicit or nonconsensual intimate images
- Sharing a recording of an incident

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Bystanders

There are four types of bystanders:
- Assistances
- Reinforcers
- Outsiders
- Defenders/upstanders

Bystanders have significant influence to make a positive difference. When bystanders of bullying intervene, **bullying stops within 10 seconds 57% of the time.**

Relationship with Suicide

- The relationship between bullying and suicide is multifaceted and complex. Ongoing bullying can exacerbate feelings of isolation, rejection, exclusion, and despair, which can significantly contribute to suicidal behavior in individuals who are already at risk.

- While bullying can often lead to suicidal thoughts, there are often other factors involved, such as underlying mental health problems.

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Why Does it Happen?

Bullying is a complex issue that does not exist in isolation. The following are reasons why a student may bully others.

- Peer factors
  - Attain social power
  - To "fit in"
- Family factors
  - Violence in the home
  - Low parental involvement
- Emotional
  - Social skill deficits
  - Difficulty with regulating emotions
- School
  - Conduct problems are not addressed

Community

School

Family

Peers

Self

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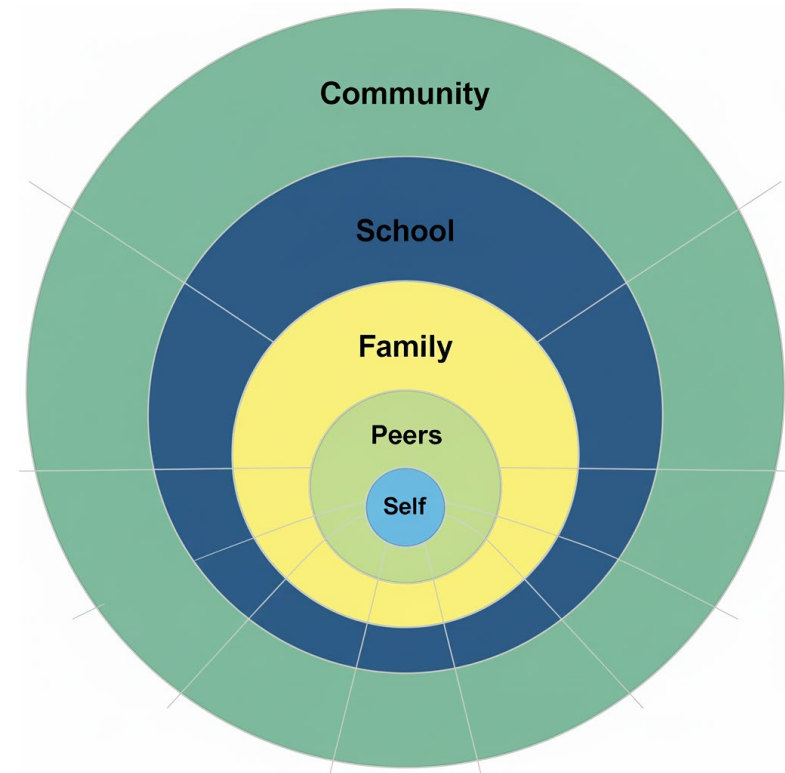
Warning Signs

Not all students who are bullied show signs, but families should watch out for the following potential indicators.

- **Behavioral changes**: avoiding social situations or expressing a desire not to go to school.

- **Physical symptoms:** frequent headaches, unexplained injuries, or difficulty sleeping.

- **Eating habits:** skipping meals or binge eating.

- **Emotional distress:** expressing feelings of helplessness, low self-esteem, or talking about suicide.

- **Property loss:** losing or having damaged clothing, books, or materials.

- **Device use:** changes in device use and/or hiding screens.

Note: risk factors for being bullied include being perceived as different, being depressed, anxious, having low self-esteem or being perceived as weak.

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Prevention and Response

Prevent

- Teach students:
  - How to identify bullying
  - What to do if it happens
  - Who to talk to
- Protective Factors:
  - Concrete Supports in Times of Need
  - Knowledge of Development
  - Social Connections
  - Resilience
  - Cognitive, Social and Emotional Competence

01 Concrete Supports in Times of Need

02 Knowledge of Development

03 Social Connections

04 Resilience

05 Cognitive, Social and Emotional Competence

Five Protective Factors

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How Youth Can Protect Themselves

If bullied:

- Calmly ask them to stop
- Seek help from an adult, friend, or classmate
- Be assertive, not aggressive
- Use humor to deflect threats
- Avoid unsafe places or walk away
- Agree with belittling comments to defuse them
- Walk with friends
- Use positive self-talk
- Avoid emotional reactions, which may embolden the bully

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Cyberbullying

- Keep evidence of cyberbullying
- Block the person who is cyberbullying
- Report to online provider
- Report to law enforcement if a crime has occurred
- Report to school

Educators Role

- Adults in schools prevent bullying by responding consistently, signaling that it is not tolerated.
- Teacher responses to bullying communicate acceptable behavior.
  - A lack of response can be seen as silent agreement.
- Consistent intervention by educators positively influences student behavior and peer relationships, reducing bullying.
- Educators must take prompt action to stop harassment and protect students from detrimental conditions.

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How to Support

- Ensure the student feels safe
- Seek ways to prevent future incidents
- Talk through what happened
- Teach stress management
- Seek professional help as necessary

What Not to Say

- Never tell the child to ignore the bullying.

- Do not blame the child for being bullied.

- Do not tell the child to physically fight back against the kid who is bullying.

- Parents should resist the urge to contact the other parents involved.

Ineffective School Efforts

- Zero tolerance
- Purely punitive approaches
- One-size fits all approaches
  - Bystander interventions
  - Bullying prevention lessons
- Bullying prevention in isolation

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The Role of the School

- Focus on school climate
- Assess bullying
- Raise and seek support for bullying prevention
- Coordinate and integrate prevention efforts
- Provide training in prevention and response
- Respond consistently and appropriately
- Spend time talking with students and staff
- Establish and enforce clear rules and policies
- Increase adult supervision
- Continue efforts over time

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Programs

The most effective elements of a bullying prevention program are:
- Parent involvement: training, meetings, and information
- Supervision: high levels of playground monitoring
- Consistency: uniform disciplinary methods
- Classroom strategies: management, rules and teacher training
- Student training: sufficient time and intensity

School-based anti-bullying programs are effective in reducing bullying perpetration by approximately **20–23%** and bullying victimization by approximately **17–20%.**

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Evidence-Based Program Directories

- What Works Clearinghouse
- Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development
- National Institute of Justice
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
- Youth.gov Program Directory Search
- Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center

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Legal and Administrative Requirements

Legislation

Multiple bills impacting bullying prevention passed in recent years, including:

- House Bill (H.B.) 428 (2022), nicknamed "Izzy's bill"
  - Required trainings to prevent harassment and discrimination
  - Steps for investigation
  - Data collected on demographics

- H.B. 84 (2024)
  - Communication plan with parents
  - Action plan to support students
  - Discipline for students who record and share incidents

- Senate Bill 223 (2025)
  - Updated the statewide definition of bullying
  - Added separate definitions for staff and student bullying

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Updates to Board Rule R277-613

In the fall of 2025, the Utah State Board of Education amended Board Rule R277-613 to include the following in addition to existing requirements.

Prohibitions on:

- Creation or distribution of sexually explicit or non consensual intimate images; and
- Sharing a recording of an incident.

Training on:

- Safe digital citizenship

Intersection of Bullying and Discrimination

- In a "[Dear Colleague" letter](#) dated October 21, 2014, the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) stated that bullying may be considered harassment when it is based on a student's race, color, national origin, sex, or disability.

- If bullying is so severe or pervasive that it creates a hostile environment and is based on certain protected traits, schools have a legal obligation to end the harassment, prevent its recurrence, and eliminate the hostile environment that limits a student's ability to participate in or benefit from school programs or activities.

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Training Requirements in Board Rule R277-613 (1)

All students, school employees, coaches and volunteers must receive training on bullying, cyber-bullying, hazing, retaliation, and abusive conduct.

This training also covers key federal laws prohibiting discrimination:

- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

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Training Requirements in Board Rule R277-613 (2)

The training must also clarify how bullying, cyber-bullying, hazing, retaliation, and abusive conduct are prohibited based upon race, color, national origin, sex, religion or disability; and the right of free speech and how it differs for students, employees, and parents.

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Action Plan: Student Targeted

The plan must include a tailored response that prioritizes the targeted student's well-being and access to education.

- **Supportive measures:** provide a tailored response that addresses the student's specific needs, including supportive measures to preserve access to educational services.

- **Accommodations for decreased exposure:** include accommodations the student may need to decrease interaction with the student who caused the incident.

- **Notification of consequences:** the targeted student's parents must be informed of the plan to address the behavior of the student who caused the incident, while complying with FERPA.

- **Access to resources:** ensure access to other requested resources, if available.

Note: the action plan cannot require the targeted student to change their educational schedule, placement, or participation in school-sponsored activities.

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Action Plan: Student Who Cause the Incident

The plan must address the behavior of the student who caused the incident through tailored consequences and necessary support.

- **Consequences and support:** establish consequences and supportive measures that are tailored to the student and preserve educational access where possible, while also protecting the well-being of other students.
- **Resources to address cause:** provide resources, strategies, or interventions designed to address the underlying cause of the incident/behavior.
- **Emergency removal:** outline a process for the emergency removal of the student from school, along with a description of what constitutes an emergency.
- **Appeals process:** provide an appeals process for one or more of the consequences included in the action plan.
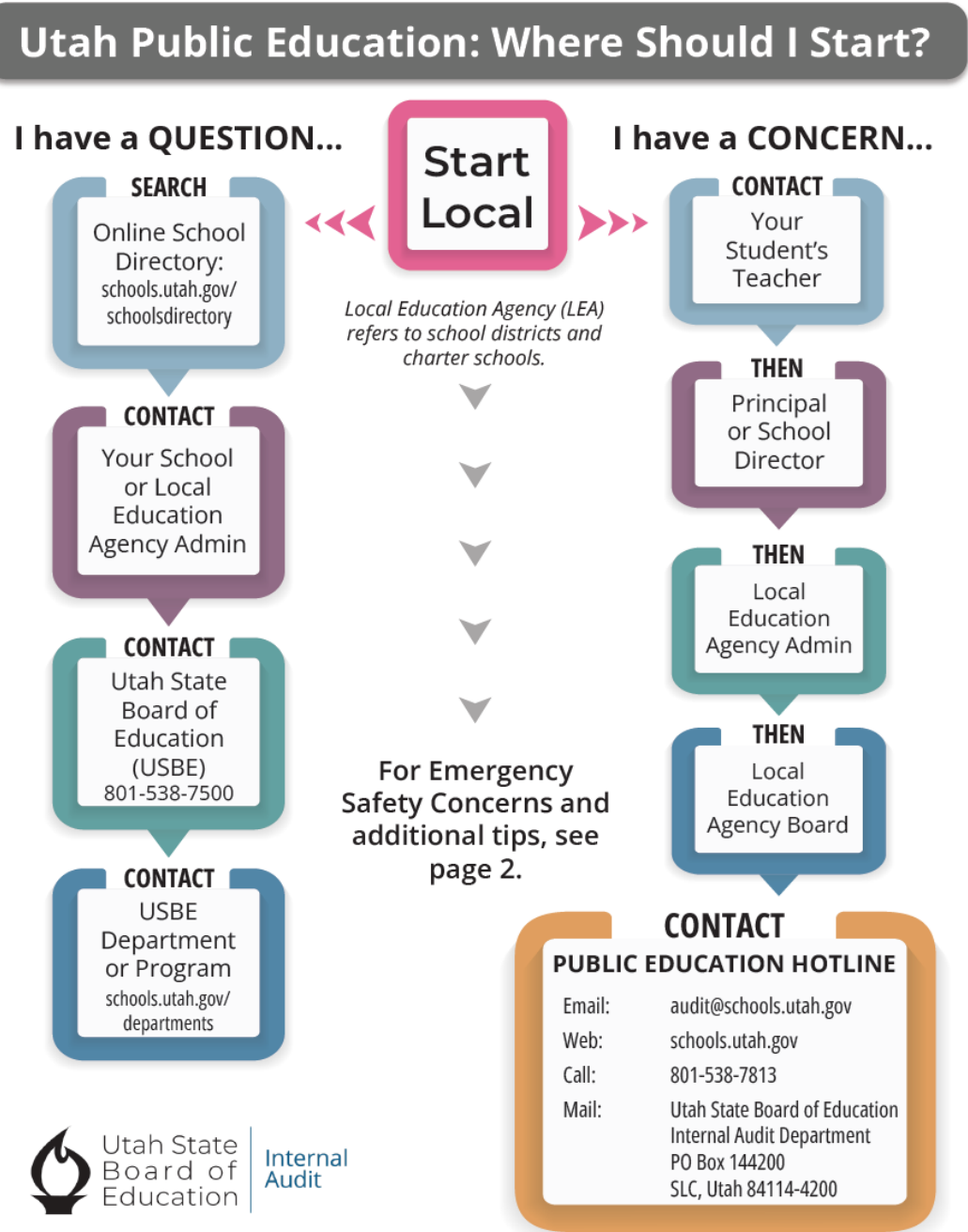
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Utah Notification Requirements

- Parent notification: schools must notify parents in a timely manner whenever their student is involved in an incident of bullying, whether they were targeted or perpetrated the incident.

- Action plan: if an incident is verified following an investigation, the school must create and implement a comprehensive action plan.

  - The action plan serves as the vehicle for ongoing communication with parents to provide regular updates and must adhere to legal guidelines.

- Voluntary parent participation: schools can develop and implement an action plan even if a parent chooses not to participate.

Accountability Practices

- Conditions for restorative conferences:
  - If a restorative conference is considered, it must be voluntary for the student who was bullied, the perpetrator must admit to actions that caused harm, and the meeting must be led by adults specifically trained and experienced in conducting restorative meetings. Experts typically discourage face-to-face meetings in verified bullying incidents because improper facilitation can exacerbate concerns.
    - Alternative: internal restorative meetings, such as one-on-one sessions between trained adult facilitators and students who bully, may be beneficial for encouraging accountability.

Hotline

Utah Public Education: Where Should I Start?

I have a QUESTION...

SEARCH
Online School Directory: schools.utah.gov/schoolsdirectory

CONTACT
Your School or Local Education Agency Admin

CONTACT
Utah State Board of Education (USBE)
801-538-7500

CONTACT
USBE Department or Program
schools.utah.gov/departments

Start Local

Local Education Agency (LEA) refers to school districts and charter schools.

For Emergency Safety Concerns and additional tips, see page 2.

I have a CONCERN...

CONTACT
Your Student's Teacher

THEN
Principal or School Director

THEN
Local Education Agency Admin

THEN
Local Education Agency Board

CONTACT
PUBLIC EDUCATION HOTLINE
Email: audit@schools.utah.gov
Web: schools.utah.gov
Call: 801-538-7813
Mail: Utah State Board of Education
Internal Audit Department
PO Box 144200
SLC, Utah 84114-4200

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Conclusion and Resources

Coming Soon

- Model Bullying Policy
- Model Incident Forms
  - Investigation
  - Parent notification
  - Reporting
  - Action plan
- Bullying toolkit for students, families, and LEAs
- Model bullying training for staff, students, and parent seminars
- Additional bullying prevention trainings (Olweus)

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Parent Portal

Utah Code Section 53G-6-806(2) mandates that USBE maintains a parent portal.

This portal requires that bullying related information be accessible to all LEAs. Such information includes:

- Bullying policy
- Resources for students involved in bullying incidents
- Steps for filing a grievance
- The designated bullying point person for each LEA

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Federal Complaints

- USBE does not investigate allegations of discrimination or enforce compliance. Discrimination claims are resolved at the district/school level or with the assistance of the OCR.

- OCR Complaint Process
  - Enforces laws prohibiting discrimination
  - Mediation and investigation
  - Must be filed within 6 months of incident

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Resources

- National Institute of Justice - Bullying
- Utah Parent Center - Bullying
- Federal Stop Bullying Initiative
- Utah's School Behavioral Health Toolkit
- Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Center
- SAFE UT
- Centers for Disease Control Violence Prevention

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Contact Information

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